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Forgotten Heroes: Lessons from School Integration in a Small Southern Community

A thesis
presented to
the faculty of the Department of History
East Tennessee State University

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Masters of Arts in History

by
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ABSTRACT

Forgotten Heroes: Lessons from School Integration in a Small Southern Community

by

Whitney Elizabeth Cate

In the fall of 1956 Clinton High School in Clinton, Tennessee became the first public school in the south to desegregate. This paper examines how the quiet southern town handled the difficult task of forced integration while maintaining a commitment to the preservation of law and order. As the strength of a community was being tested, ordinary citizens in extraordinary circumstances met the challenges of integration with exceptional courage.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents. Thank you for your contagious passion for history.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The United States of America was founded upon the principles of liberty and justice, but not for all. Thomas Jefferson's beautifully written words guaranteeing life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness forged the American creed. During the American Revolution, proud patriots fought bravely to ensure Jefferson's declaration would become a reality. Both freed and enslaved Africans joined in the battle for American autonomy with the hope that it would lead to their eventual independence. For many Americans, promises were fulfilled, but for African-Americans the grand ideas of independence and freedom etched into the nation's most sacred documents proved to be nothing more than elusive dreams.

Nearly a century after fighting a war for independence from Great Britain, the United States found itself facing an internal struggle for independence. Torn apart over the issue of slavery, the southern United States seceded from the Union in efforts to keep the cherished institution of slavery intact. Slavery was the South's most prized economic tool. Before President Lincoln's famed emancipation proclamation, slaves formed the backbone of the entire economic structure of the South. Like a horse used to till the fields, slaves served as a vital commodity to southern industry. After the defeat of the South in the American Civil War, it was imperative for white southerners to keep black people "in their place" for fear that they may gain economic and political clout. With an abundant black population in the southern United States, many white citizens

feared that, if allowed an education or voting rights, African-Americans could become a potent threat to the Caucasian power structure. Every attempt was made to keep black Americans trapped at an economic level resembling indentured servitude. Unwilling to give up their cheap source of labor, white southerners sought to keep blacks as close to powerless slaves as possible.

The birth of the twentieth century brought on even more conflict but this time on an international scale. World War II pushed America's treasured democratic ideology into the global limelight. In the spring of 1944 President Franklin D. Roosevelt announced, "The United Nations are fighting to make a world in which tyranny and aggression cannot exist; a world based upon freedom, equality, and justice, a world in which all persons, regardless of race, color and creed, may live in peace, honor and dignity."¹ For the alleged "Arsenal of Democracy,"² the disgraceful treatment of African-Americans at home was a serious fallacy in American foreign policy. Highlighting the deplorable American irony of WWII, author Stephen Ambrose asserted, "The world's greatest democracy fought the world's greatest racist with a segregated army."³ Worldwide exposure of blatant American hypocrisy undermined the United States' objective of spreading freedom and democracy throughout the world.

Over 1 million African- Americans served in the armed forces during World War II but many questioned the rationale for supporting the war effort. In 1942, James Thompson wrote a letter to the editor of the *Pittsburgh Courier*, titled, "Should I Sacrifice To Live 'Half American?'", in which he argued the need for African Americans to wage a

¹ *Taps for a Jim Crow Army: Letters from Black Soldiers in World War II*, ed. Phillip McGuire (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1993), 134.

² Jean Edward Smith, *FDR* (New York: Random House Publishing Group, 2008), 481.

³ Stephen E. Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 528.

"double V" campaign, victory over our enemies abroad, and victory at home over racial prejudice. The "double V" initiative helped African-American leaders build coalitions and generate public support for an ongoing civil rights campaign.⁴ As the war finally came to a close in 1945, and with victory secured abroad, African-American leaders looked to continue the fight at home.

African-American veterans returned home to the United States with a sense of empowerment and resentment. Decorated American soldier Daniel Inouye, who spent time in a Japanese Internment camp during the war, elaborated on the effects the war had on American civil rights, "One of the most important results of this war was to begin the process of integration... I think the war played a major role in civil rights. Not realizing that that was the purpose, but, so after that, who will tell us, no, you're not worth to be considered Americans? No one can tell us that to our face."⁵ Another serviceman claimed, "I spent four years in the Army to free a bunch of Dutchmen and Frenchmen, and I'm hanged if I'm going to let the Alabama version of the Germans kick me around when I get home. No sirree-bob! I went into the Army a nigger; I'm comin' out a man."⁶ Discontented with their second class citizenship, and knowing they both earned and deserved better treatment, African-American leaders prepared to launch an assault on the racial inequities plaguing the nation.

⁴ Jennifer C. James, *A Freedom Bought with Blood*: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 297.

⁵ Ken Burns and Lynn Novick, *The War*, ed. WETA Florentine Films, Vol. Documentary: PBS Distribution, 2007).

⁶ John A. Hall and Charles Lindholm, *Is America Breaking Apart?* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001), 64.

From 1940-1946 the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People membership expanded from 50,000 to 450,000 as the budding Civil Rights movement continued to gain momentum.⁷ The NAACP fought to end racial discrimination through litigation, education, and extensive lobbying efforts. Hoping to exploit inherently flawed legislation, the NAACP's strategy focused primarily on the judiciary, rather than legislative or executive branches of the government that placated Southern segregationists. Led by Charles Hamilton Houston and Thurgood Marshall, the NAACP's legal team embarked on a campaign to bring about the reversal of the "separate but equal" doctrine upheld by the 1896 *Plessy v Ferguson* case. In 1954, the NAACP won its greatest legal victory in the Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education* which declared state laws establishing separate public schools for black and white students unconstitutional. The unanimous Supreme Court verdict was a huge step towards dismantling segregation in the South. The abolishment of the faulty "separate but equal" doctrine paved the way for integration and marked a crucial milestone in the Civil Rights Movement.⁸

Education is one of the most fundamental functions of state and local governments. In the United States, education is considered the foundation of good citizenship. Providing students with a proper education is a primary instrument in introducing children to cultural values, preparing them for professional training, and perhaps most importantly, investing in education is an investment in America's future.

⁷ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, ed. C. Vann Woodward, Vol. X: Oxford University Press, 1996), 20.

⁸ Christine H. Rossell and David J. Armor, *School Desegregation in the 21st Century* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2002), 3-4.

In the wake of the *Brown* decision, many Southern towns displayed overt defiance towards the Supreme Court ruling and loudly voiced their refusal to cooperate. On March 12, 1956, one hundred and one disgruntled southern congressmen pledged their support to defend segregation by signing the Southern Manifesto. Declaring the new federal law an obvious abuse of judicial power, the Southern Manifesto rebuked the *Brown* decision as a clear violation of states' and individual rights. All but four southern senators signed the document vowing to uphold segregation; two names absent that list were Senators Gore and Keakauver representing Tennessee.⁹

Following suit with the rest of the South, racial ostracism, whether by law or tradition, extended to nearly all aspects of public life in Tennessee. Although Tennessee state authorities opposed the admission of black students to white schools, their duty to uphold the ruling of the Supreme Court trumped any personal apprehensions. For years Tennessee legislators fought vehemently to preserve their segregated way of life. With pending court cases whose fate depended on the outcome of the *Brown* decision, and a Supreme Court order demanding the enforcement of *Brown* with, "all deliberate speed,"¹⁰ Clinton, Tennessee, by a legal twist of fate, became *Brown*'s "test-tube town."¹¹

⁹ Clive Webb, *Rabble Rousers: The American Far Right in the Civil Rights Era* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 43.

¹⁰ *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* [74 S. Ct. 686]

¹¹ David Halberstam, "The Town that Became Everybody's Test Tube," *Reporter* (January 10, 1957), 1.

As motorists passed through the quaint town of Clinton they were greeted by a sign that read, “Welcome to Clinton, A wonderful place to live.”¹² Clinton, Tennessee was the epitome of a small southern town in the 1950s quiet, simple, and segregated. The local Board of Education fought integration in the courts, but when the final legal battle was lost, the town knew desegregation was inevitable. Despite adherence to the Jim Crow system, Clinton boasted harmonious race relations, with its small black community residing primarily in the segregated neighborhood of Foley Hill. Town leaders vowed to do everything possible to ensure a smooth and peaceful transition to school integration. In the fall of 1956, Clinton High School became the first public school in the South to integrate. Often overshadowed by the events in Little Rock, Arkansas, the story of Clinton’s integration crisis is relatively unknown.

“The Law of the Land” takes a look at the legal aspects surrounding integration and explains how Clinton High School came to be the first school in the South to desegregate. Beginning with the abolition of slavery and culminating in the denouncement of state-sponsored segregation, Chapter two documents the important laws that upheld and reversed segregation. Tracing the origins of both federal and Tennessee state laws regarding race allows for a better understanding of the situation that transpired in the fall of 1956.

When Jo Ann Allen, one of the first African-American students to attend Clinton High School, was asked about her experience in the fall of 1956 she proclaimed, “nobody run, nobody hide- keep praising the Lord. Thank God for the good, the bad,

¹² Webb, *Rabble Rousers: The American Far Right in the Civil Rights Era*, 41

and the ugly.”¹³ Chapter three examines the major events and players involved in Clinton’s attempt to implement integration. Each part of the community played a crucial role in the difficult desegregation process, “The good, the bad, and the ugly,” chronologically details the experiences of Clinton residents during the tumultuous first year of integration. Much attention is paid to the presence of outside agitator John Kasper, who tried desperately to turn the town of Clinton upside-down with his racially charged propaganda. Refusing to succumb to mob rule, citizens of Clinton banded together to protect their town from an all out collapse of law and order. Unspeakable displays of hatred and incredible acts of kindness distinguish this remarkable story of courage and perseverance.

During the first year of integration the people of Clinton endured incredible hardship. Chapter four, “From Tragedy to Triumph,” discusses notable accomplishments achieved during the school’s first year of integration. From a surprise verdict rendered by an all white-jury, to the graduation of the first African-American student from an integrated southern school, the small town served as an example to the nation that integration could work, even in the South. Clinton’s integrated school terrified dedicated segregationists across the South. In 1958, two years after first receiving orders to desegregate, Clinton High School was decimated by dynamite. Displaying tremendous strength in struggle, the final chapter highlights the remarkable resolve of a community in crisis.

Founding father and America’s first Secretary of Treasury Alexander Hamilton stated that, “There is a certain enthusiasm in liberty, that makes human nature rise

¹³ "An Evening with the Clinton 12" at the Children's Defense Fund Haley Farm in Norris, Tenn., Friday, Jan. 13, 2011.

above itself, in acts of bravery and heroism.”¹⁴ In the face of great adversity, Maurice Soles, Alfred Williams, Gail Ann Epps, Ronald Hayden, Robert Thacker, Jo Ann Allen, Bobby Cain, William Latham, Minnie Ann Dickey, Regina Turner, Anna Theresser Caswell, and Alvah McSwain became the first black students to attend an integrated school in the South.¹⁵ Determined to rise above violence and hate, the residents of Clinton, Tennessee demonstrated exceptional courage as they fought to find peace in chaos.

¹⁴ Harvey Flaumenhaft, *The Effective Republic: Administration and Constitution in the Thought of Alexander Hamilton*

(Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1992), 78.

¹⁵ Green McAdoo Cultural Center and Museum, Clinton Tennessee, 2012.

CHAPTER 2

THE LAW OF THE LAND

Prior to the Civil War, the United States' population contained approximately 4.5 million African Americans, but less than 500,000 were free. For nearly 4 million African Americans, the tumultuous South was home. With slavery rampant throughout the southern United States, the possibility of education for the majority of blacks was virtually nonexistent.¹⁶ The defeat of the South in 1865 gave blacks in the region a glimmer of hope, hope for change and equality, but their hope and optimism was quickly met with bitterness and resentment during the reconstruction period.

The seeds of school desegregation were planted in 1868, three years after the end of the American Civil War, when the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution neglected to provide equal education for African Americans in the southern states. Congressional Republicans demanded the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment to ensure the civil rights of African-Americans after the reunification of the Union. The Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendments asserts that, "No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of the law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws."¹⁷

¹⁶ Rossell and Armor, *School Desegregation in the 21st Century*, 17

¹⁷ U.S. Constitution, amend. 14, sec. 1.

Less than twenty years later, all of the former states of the Confederacy enacted laws aimed at segregating blacks and whites in nearly every aspect of public life. These racially discriminating laws, commonly referred to as “Jim Crow Laws,” went unchallenged for nearly half a century. Driven by court decisions, school desegregation was a controversial and pertinent judicial issue. During the early years of desegregation litigation in the South, the main issue revolved around the issue of one-race schools and the failure to eliminate them.

Hostility towards Reconstruction further fueled racial prejudice already widespread in the South. Jim Crow laws adopted across the South ensured that whites not only would not be required to share schools with blacks, but water fountains, swimming pools, restrooms, buses, and numerous other public arenas remained lawfully segregated. In 1896, state-imposed segregation was finally put to the test in the quintessential *Plessy v. Ferguson* case.

The Railway Accommodation Act was passed in 1890 by the Louisiana State Legislature mandating, “equal but separate accommodations for the white and colored races”¹⁸ on all passenger railways in the state.¹⁹ A small group of blacks known as the “Creoles of Color”, mainly from the New Orleans region, formed a Citizens Committee to challenge the Constitutionality of the Louisiana statute. In 1892, light complected Homer Plessy identified himself as African American and intentionally took a seat in the whites-only section. Plessy’s refusal to adhere with the Louisiana Law guaranteed his arrest

¹⁸ Tommy L. Lott and John P. Pittman, "A Companion to African-American Philosophy" (2005), 306.

¹⁹ Earl Pollock, *The Supreme Court and American Democracy: Case Studies on Judicial Review and Public Policy* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2009), 36.Ibid.

and landed him in jail. Homer Plessy's case made its way to the Supreme Court where his attorneys contended that the Separate Car Act was in direct violation of Plessy's thirteenth and fourteenth amendment rights. Upholding the Louisiana Law, the Supreme Court ruled against Plessy under the famous doctrine of "separate but equal."²⁰

Only one Supreme Court Justice disagreed with the majority opinion of the Court written by Justice Henry Billings Brown. Brown argued the Louisiana law was not intended to stigmatize blacks, which upheld the view of the Court asserting, "the underlying fallacy of the plaintiff's argument ... [lies] in the assumption that enforced separation of the two races stamps the colored race with a badge of inferiority. If this be so, it is not by reason of anything found in this act, but solely because the colored race chooses to put that construction upon it."²¹ According to the Supreme Court, as long as the heralded principle of separate but equal was not violated, racial separation was completely legal. Lone dissenter Justice John Marshall Harlan commented that, "Everyone knows that the statute in question had its origin in the purpose, not so much to exclude white persons from railroad cars occupied by blacks, as to exclude colored people from coaches occupied or assigned to whites."²²

Tennessee has an extensive history of racial segregation. After the Civil War, like the rest of the wounded southern states, Tennessee enacted a series of statutes that made racial segregation lawful. These laws required *de jure* segregation of the

²⁰ Lott and Pittman, *A Companion to African-American Philosophy*, 306

²¹ Rossell and Armor, *School Desegregation in the 21st Century*, 19

²² Ibid., 19

races and extended to nearly every part of society. Marriage, public transportation, and of course public education are just a few on the long list of institutions impacted by the racially divisive laws. In 1870, the Tennessee Constitution was amended to prohibit interracial marriage, that same year the legislature took it a step further by imposing another statute that mandated prison time for those who did not abide by the law against interracial unions.

In hopes of limiting public accommodations, in 1875, the state passed a law which granted proprietors the right to exclude any person they desired. By 1881, railroad companies were required to designate separate cars for “colored passengers.” As the automobile gained popularity in the early 1900s, street cars were also forced to separate colored passengers. To clarify for anyone confused as to what constitutes a “Negro”, the State Code was amended in 1932 to classify as “Negro”, any person with “Negro” blood.²³

The first school segregation act in Tennessee passed in 1866, forcing separate schools systems for white and black students. Just a few years later in 1869, under article XI of the State Constitution, integration of any Tennessee school was strictly prohibited. Operating under segregated policy, in 1873 the state passed legislation which stipulated that, “white and colored persons shall not be taught in the same school, but in separate schools under the same general regulations as to management,

²³ Monica Aitzu and Monique Rainey, *School Desegregation in Tennessee: 12 Districts Released from Desegregation Orders*
17 Districts Remain Under Court Jurisdiction (: Tennessee Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights, April 2008), 1.

usefulness, and efficiency.”²⁴ By 1901, any school officials implementing integrated education practices violated state law and could face a \$50 fine, imprisonment from 30 to 60 days, or both.²⁵

Surrounded by the staunch segregation supporting states of Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia, Tennessee shares the traditional and customary antagonism towards integration. Even though Tennessee has harbored some of the same convictions as its neighboring states, Tennessee, specifically the eastern part of the state, differs quite substantially from the rest of the Deep South. Union sympathizers during the Civil War, East Tennessee has a long record of electing Republicans to both local and state offices. Modern developments like TVA’s Norris Dam, Oak Ridge’s atomic city, and the unionization of mine workers aided in the gradual process of dismantling Jim Crow in Tennessee.²⁶

With blacks comprising less than five percent of Clinton’s population, racial conflict was extremely minimal. In terms of race relations, Clinton was considered a friendly community. According to Buford Lewallen, the mayor’s son, “These aren’t like the Deep South Negroes, we haven’t had integration, but they’ve never been like the bowing down ones, always tipping their hats and stepping aside on the street corner, these are people who vote, who call us by our name, and who have self respect.”²⁷ It

²⁴ Ibid., 2

²⁵ Ibid., 2-3

²⁶ George Barrett, "Study in Desegregation: The Clinton Story," *NY Times Magazine*, September 16, 1956, 12.

²⁷ Halberstam, *The Town that Became Everybody's Test Tube*, 1

was that sense of self-respect that gave members of Clinton's black community the strength to fight for the equal treatment they deserved.

The Tennessee Valley Authority projects implemented in the 1930s and 1940s, and the overwhelming influx of people with the additions made at the Manhattan Engineering Works, now known as the Oak Ridge Project, transformed the small Tennessee community drastically. Prior to 1933, the population was mostly agrarian with close to 20,000 people residing in Anderson county. By the 1950s, the population had tripled to nearly 60,000 citizens, and the county was becoming increasingly industrial. Elevated school enrollments left the county facing several crucial issues. Trying to meet space and facility requirements while trying to find teachers to fill vacant positions was the start of a long list of problems David Joseph Brittain, Jr. faced early in his career as principal of Clinton High School.

Brittain came from a family of accomplished educators. D. J. Brittain, Sr., his father, taught at Maryville College, worked as principal of Wynn High School, and enjoyed a long tenure as principal of Oliver Springs High School just outside of Clinton, Tennessee. D.J. Brittain's mother also worked as a teacher at Oliver Springs High School. Even his Uncle, James F. Brittain served as the superintendent of nearby Roane County Schools for a record number of years. After graduating from Oliver Springs High School in 1933, D.J. Brittain, Jr. received his A.B. degree from Maryville

College, followed by his M.S. degree from the University of Tennessee. Later, Brittain went on to earn his Ph.D at New York University in New York City.²⁸

Brittain first began his career in Clinton in 1937, accepting a position as a teacher and coach at Clinton High School. Successfully heading up both the football and basketball programs, Brittain's talent as an educator did not go unnoticed, and he soon transferred from Clinton High after being asked to be the principal at neighboring Lake City High School. Brittain was not gone long; in 1944 he was called back to Clinton High School, but this time as principal of the school. Immediately, Brittain was confronted with a multitude of problems that needed to be swiftly addressed.

Principal Brittain did not waste any time tackling the mounting challenges, and his determination quickly paid off. By 1948, the space shortage was alleviated with the completion of two additions to the original building, and just a few years later Clinton High School boasted a brand new gymnasium. With improved facilities and faculty, under the exceptional leadership of principal Brittain, Clinton High was taking strides towards becoming an A-1 school. The restructuring and modernization of Clinton High School only came to fruition with the extensive effort put forth by the faculty, student body, parents, and community members.²⁹

The exemplary joint effort of school and community led to the adoption of an operating philosophy that proved to be vitally important over the next decade. The fundamental theme of this philosophy asserted, "that the appraisal of a school program

²⁸Roberts E. Snyder, *History of Clinton Senior High School, 1806-1971* (Clinton: Distributive Education Department, Clinton Senior High School, 1971), 51-52.

²⁹Ibid., 52

lies in the citizens produced and the effective way in which these citizens meet the problems of our changing world.”³⁰ The hard work was rewarded with the 1954 announcement that Clinton High School had earned a spot as a member of the Southern Association of Secondary Schools and Colleges, indicating that its curriculum and training facilities were competitive with the top schools in the region.³¹

Not everyone in Clinton was enjoying the success of the flourishing local high school. Clinton, like the rest of the public high schools in the South, remained segregated. Several key pieces of legislation are pertinent in the understanding of the legal situation at Clinton High School. The Tennessee General Assembly enacted a law in 1867 which provided that blacks and whites attend separate schools. Three years later the Tennessee Constitution, under Article XI, section 2, contended that, “No school established, or aided, under this section shall allow white and Negro children to be received as scholars together in the same school.”³² By 1950, all of the former Confederate States, and Missouri, Oklahoma, Kentucky, and Maryland made segregation in schools mandatory. The United States Congress approved the practice of segregation by providing for it and allowing it in the District of Columbia.³³

In 1950, during the last week of August, four African-American students attempted to enroll at Clinton High School. Each student met all eligibility requirements,

³⁰ Ibid., 52

³¹ Ibid., 53

³² Bobby L. Lovett, *The Civil Rights Movement in Tennessee: A Narrative History* : Univ Tennessee Press, 28.

³³ Ibid., 28 The 11 states that made up the Confederacy were Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia.

except for their race. Parents of the students met with Principal Brittain and Superintendent Frank E. Irwin who informed them that Tennessee state law restricted their enrollment at Clinton High School. Instead, the students were instructed to attend Campbell County Colored High School, a "C" grade school in Lafollette, Tennessee.³⁴

Anderson County Attorney General Sam K. Carson inquired whether or not Anderson County was required to allow black students to attend its high schools, to which State Attorney General Roy H. Beeler simply responded, "You'll have to fight your own battle."³⁵ The issue surfaced after a Nashville NAACP attorney announced that he had received complaints from parents whose children were denied attendance to county schools and forced to attend black schools outside of their residential counties. Backed by the NAACP, in December of 1950, the parents of JoHeather McSwain, Thomas and William Dickie, and Lillian and Shirley Willis filed suit in Federal Court in Knoxville to obtain admission to the Anderson County school system. Not only were black students unable to attend school in their county, but students' parents were also burdened with the costly transportation expenses to send them elsewhere. The petition filed with the Court alleged that the students spent ten to twelve hours a day going to school, traveling between 35 to 55 miles, which does not even include the one to five mile hike made to access transportation.³⁶

Nashville attorney Alexander Looby and Avon N. Williams and Carl A. Cowan of Knoxville were appointed by NAACP as representative counsel for the black students.

³⁴ Snyder, *History of Clinton Senior High School, 1806-1971*, 54

³⁵ Robert Booker, "Papers Reveal Details of ET School Desegregation," *Knoxville News Sentinel*, May 10, 2011.

³⁶ Ibid.

Many previous attempts aimed at reversing the “separate but equal” doctrine outlined in the landmark 1896 *Plessy v Ferguson* decision had all been denied. In 1927, *Gong Lum v. Rice* case, the Court ruled that the exclusion on account of race of a child of Chinese ancestry from a state high school was not in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, effectively approving the exclusion of minority children from all-white schools. The *Plessy* case upheld segregation on railways, and *Gong Lum v. Rice* allowed for the doctrine to be applicable in schools.³⁷

If separate but equal was going to be the law of the land, then the NAACP was going to ensure that it was properly enforced. In 1936, Lloyd Gaines was denied admission to the University of Missouri Law School; the all black Lincoln University in Missouri did not have a law school. Missouri law demanded black and white separation, so Gaines fixed his eyes on the Supreme Court. The Court ruled in the appeal that Gaines was entitled to a legal education, but not necessarily at the University of Missouri. By failing to provide separate but equal legal training, Missouri was in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment which promised protection of equal laws. Ultimately, in *Missouri ex rel. Gaines v. Canada*, the Supreme Court ordered Gaines’ entrance to the University of Missouri School of Law until an appropriate all-black law school was established.³⁸

The Gaines decision served as a critical legal weapon in the fight against the separate but equal doctrine. In his 1938 Supreme Court opinion, Chief Justice Charles

³⁷ Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality* (New York: Knopf, 2004), 160.

³⁸ Rudolph Jr Alexander, *Racism, African Americans, and Social Justice* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 23.

Evan Hughes stipulated that if equal education facilities did not exist, then the state was required to admit qualified black students to the all-white institutions. Now states would either have to build new schools for blacks, which would carry a heavy financial burden, or admit them into white schools. The Court had yet to apply the doctrine laid out in *Missouri ex rel. Gaines v. Canada* to a high school, but Anderson County provided the ideal opportunity to test the Court's ruling.³⁹

As of August 1950, Anderson County was home to three high schools for white students and zero for black students. According to Tennessee State Law, the establishment of a high school mandated no less than 75 pupils; in Anderson County only 30 black children met the eligibility requirements. Following the five black students' application for enrollment, the Board of Education voted, "to pay all expenses (transportation and tuition) for any Anderson County Negro child desiring to attend Austin High School in Knoxville, TN, or an equivalent amount for attendance at other high school, Austin High was an "A" grade high school."⁴⁰ Drawing from the arguments made in the Gaines case that made it unlawful to send a student out of state to school, the students' attorneys applied the same logic and asserted that it was also unlawful to send a student out of the county.

Unlike the students' legal counsel, the Anderson County School Board did not see a problem with shipping black students to another county. Complaints regarding the unfair education practices led the school board to try and send the African-American students to Oak Ridge High School, a government funded school on federal property.

³⁹ Ibid., 23

⁴⁰ Snyder, *History of Clinton Senior High School, 1806-1971*, 55

With Oak Ridge authorities' refusal to cooperate, the school board's attempt to outsource their problem failed.

Attorneys Sidney Davis and W.B. Lewallen of Clinton, Tennessee represented the school board in the McSwaine case. At the advice of their counsel, the Anderson County School Board passed a resolution in 1951 which essentially stipulated that Tennessee State Law made it impossible to create an all-black high school in Anderson County. Instead, the board passed a solution in the form of naming Austin and Rockwood High Schools as the appropriate schools for African American students living in Anderson County. Undeterred by the unsatisfactory solutions posed by the school board, the case continued to trial on February 13, 1952. *McSwaine vs Board of Education* was heard in the U.S. District Court in Knoxville, Tennessee with Judge Robert L. Taylor presiding.⁴¹

Native to East Tennessee, Judge Robert Taylor came from a family of political legends. Known for his good manners and southern charm, Taylor was a popular public figure in Tennessee.⁴² On May 19, 1952, Judge Taylor ruled in favor of the school board on the grounds that Anderson County had fulfilled its requirements by providing equal, or better, educational facilities. Unsatisfied with Taylor's judgment, the plaintiffs quickly filed their appeal to the United States Circuit Court of Appeals in Cincinnati,

⁴¹ Ibid., 56-57

⁴² John N. Popham, "Clinton Case Points Up South's Varied Nature," *The New York Times*, July 28, 1957.

Ohio. In 1953, the Tennessee case was put on hold until a ruling was issued in the anticipated United States Supreme Court case, *Brown v. Board of Education*.⁴³

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and its legal offspring, the Legal Defense and Educational Fund, developed a systematic attack against the doctrine of separate but equal. The attack culminated in five separate cases developed from the states of Delaware, Kansas, Virginia, and South Carolina and Washington, D.C. While the facts of each case are different, the main issue in each was the constitutionality of state-sponsored segregation in public schools. Each of these cases lost in the District Courts and all were appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court clumped together under the name of one of them, *Oliver Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*.⁴⁴ Justice Tom Clark later explained that the Court felt it was better to have representative cases from different parts of the country with *Brown* first "so that the whole question would not smack of being a purely Southern one."⁴⁵

The nine jurors that make up the United States Supreme Court are responsible for handling the most vexing social and political problems facing the nation. Separated from the collective biases of the electorate, the highest Court in the country translates its most perplexing controversies into the language of a lawsuit. On May 17, 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court declared its unanimous decision that segregation was inherently unconstitutional and in violation of the 14th Amendment of the United States

⁴³ Snyder, *History of Clinton Senior High School, 1806-1971*, 57

⁴⁴ Doug Davis, *Gifts Given: Family, Community, and Integration's Move from the Courtroom to the Schoolyard* : iUniverse, 2012), xix.

⁴⁵ Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality* , 542

Constitution. Stressing the importance of education and citing the dehumanizing effects of segregation, Chief Justice Earl Warren outlined the decision of the Supreme Court as he delivered the opinion of the Court.

We come then to the question presented: Does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other ‘tangible’ factors may be equal, deprive the children of the minority group of equal education opportunities? We believe it does not... We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place.

Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.⁴⁶

The 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* was one of the most hotly debated judicial decisions of the twentieth century and marked a critical turning point in the struggle for civil rights. Ultimately, the conclusion in *Brown v. Board*, “influenced the path of American racial transformation, shaped our understanding of the Supreme Court’s role in American society, and altered our conception of the relationship between law and social reform.”⁴⁷ The Brown judgment initiated educational reform throughout the United States and served as a catalyst in launching the modern Civil Rights Movement, bringing Americans one step closer to true freedom and equal rights. For the small, quiet town of Clinton, Tennessee, the Brown decision carried major implications.

⁴⁶ Peter B. Levy, *The Civil Rights Movement* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1998), 156.

⁴⁷ Michael J. Klarman, *Brown v. Board of Education and the Civil Rights Movement: Abridged Edition of from Jim Crow to Civil Rights: The Supreme Court and the Struggle for Racial Equality* : Oxford ; Oxford University Press, 2007., ix.

CHAPTER 3

THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY

The initial reaction to the *Brown* decision was more moderate in Tennessee than in other states in the region. The University of Tennessee in Knoxville had already admitted African American students two years prior to *Brown*, and neighboring Robertson Junior High School in Oak Ridge enrolled forty-five black students with little incident in 1955. Outside of Federal jurisdiction, Robertson Junior High failed to establish precedence, but the peaceful inclusion of African American pupils gave hope for a similar outcome in Clinton.

In the 1954 Tennessee gubernatorial race, racial moderate Frank Clement defeated his reactionary adversary Gordon Browning and quickly demonstrated his commitment to progress by vetoing four bills designed to pull state funds from integrated schools. Two years later, state leaders further solidified their position when Senators Albert Gore and Estes Kefauver and Congressman Percy Priest refused to sign the Southern Manifesto, a declaration of resistance enacted by southern legislators in protest of the *Brown* decision.⁴⁸ Forces opposing integration lacked the continuity and organization to mount a formidable resistance.

Hostility towards integration was prevalent throughout Tennessee, but the only substantial resistance effort came from the western part of the state, which seemed to be more congruent with its border sharing state Mississippi. The establishment of

⁴⁸ Webb, *Rabble Rousers: The American Far Right in the Civil Rights Era* , 42

numerous segregationist groups like the Tennessee Federation for Constitutional Government, Tennessee Society to Maintain Segregation, and the States' Rights Council of Tennessee did little to advance segregationist agendas. Competing groups made the formation of a strong, unified resistance impossible.⁴⁹

In general, the attitudes of most Clinton residents was that they had, "a high type of colored people," or, "a pretty good bunch of niggers" living in their town.⁵⁰ The perception of friendly race relations in Clinton grew from an absence of trouble and overall submissive attitudes of African Americans living in a system that facilitated their exclusion. The charming, rural town was operated solely by whites, with African-Americans making up a minuscule part of the population, approximately 200 in a town of 4000. With only a handful of blacks residing in Clinton, African Americans were unable to support their own businesses and professional services, making it virtually impossible for them to obtain any leadership positions within the Aryan dominated community. Most African- Americans were economically dependent on the white population, as they provided many employment opportunities. Underrepresentation of blacks, coupled with a lack of trained leadership, left them uninvolved in virtually every aspect community life.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Ibid., 43

⁵⁰ Anna Holden, Bonita Valien and Preston Valien, *Field Reports on Desegregation in the South: A Tentative Description and Analysis of the School Desegregation Crisis* (Austin, Texas: Anti- Defamation League of B'nai B'rith), 9.

⁵¹ June N. Adamson, "Few Black Voices Heard: The Black Community and the Desegregation Crisis in Clinton, Tennessee, 1956," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, no. 53 (1994), 31.

Very few people in Clinton favored integration. Perfectly content with the status quo, most people preferred to remain segregated. As soon as the 1954 decision was handed down, Clinton officials knew they had lost the fight against integration. Shocked parents voiced their concern at local PTA meetings, “over 90% at nearly all the meetings did not like the idea, probably 99%, but at the same time, at least 98% would say if it were a question of obeying the law, and there was no legal way out, they would ‘go along with it.’”⁵² With the preservation of law and order at the forefront of everyone’s minds, it was agreed that the change should be met with acceptance and adherence. Although it was not the desired outcome, it was the law, and the citizens of Clinton, Tennessee had every intention of abiding by it. As the details of desegregation were published in the local newspapers, there were no signs of disturbance or resistance.⁵³

Many people who opposed desegregation did not believe that the school would actually implement it, and consequently did little to resist it ahead of time. Others simply did not understand, or had no knowledge of, the court order forcing Clinton High School to desegregate. Ignorance and confusion made the already difficult task that much harder. Some of the less educated citizenry, surprised to learn that Mayor and City Council were not in charge of school operations, argued that , “ ‘the crowd’ that runs

⁵² Holden, Valien, and Valien, *Field Reports on Desegregation in the South: A Tentative Description and Analysis of the School Desegregation Crisis* , 10

⁵³ Wayne Phillips, "Integration: The Pattern Emerges," *New York Times Magazine*, September 29, 1957, 2.

Clinton does what it pleases about everything else and could ‘put the niggers out of the school’.”⁵⁴

The exceptionally small minority group supporting integration generally based their stance on moral convictions rather than issues of legality. Unfortunately, it was a relatively silent minority, including the ministers. Even when the Bible was used as a tool to promote and justify segregation, no one stood up to refute the racist propaganda. A local civic worker commented that integration was the, “only Christian solution” and condemned churches “for trying to be neutral on a moral issue.” She boldly asserted, “Our churches have let us down. I don’t mean here, but all over the nation.”⁵⁵ It was incomprehensible how ministers, the supposed beacon of moral light, could not stand up against the systematic disenfranchisement of a people based on skin color. As the turmoil worsened, several churches finally broke their silence and played a crucial role as the crisis in Clinton unfolded.

As the school year approached, the town of Clinton anticipated a smooth, orderly transition. During the summer months, Principal Brittain orchestrated a series of meetings with parents to help ease anxieties and encourage compliance. On August 20, 1956, after fifteen African American students registered for school without complication, Clinton citizens remained hopeful that the process would continue peacefully. Just four days later, the arrival of a smooth-talking, twenty-six year old Northerner guaranteed that the process was going to be anything but peaceful.

⁵⁴ Holden, Valien, and Valien, *Field Reports on Desegregation in the South: A Tentative Description and Analysis of the School Desegregation Crisis*, 11

⁵⁵ Mary L. Cleveland, "A Baptist Pastor & Social Injustice in Clinton, TN." *Baptist Hist. & Heritage* 14, no. 2 (1979), 16.

New Jersey native and staunch segregationist Frederick John Kasper had little association with the South prior to his August arrival in 1956. Self-proclaimed protégé of fascist poet Ezra Pound, Kasper was an articulate, well-groomed young man who employed an Ivy League approach to further his anti-Semitic and segregationist agenda. Many people in Knoxville and Anderson County believe the events that occurred over the next few months would never have happened if the trouble-seeking, rabble rouser had never come to town.⁵⁶ Historians have almost entirely ignored John Kasper, but his story is crucial to understanding white resistance to racial change, and even more pertinent in comprehending the events that transpired in Clinton, Tennessee in the fall of 1956 .

Raised in a middle-class family in New Jersey, Kasper reportedly suffered from a personality disorder for which he received counseling. Although not an overly impressive student, Kasper managed to graduate with a B.S in “General Studies” from prestigious Columbia University. While studying at Columbia, Kasper was first introduced to writer and poet Ezra Pound, whose work greatly impacted Kasper and ultimately changed his life. According to Pound’s biographer, Kasper and Pound began their correspondence after Kasper wrote to Pound detailing a term paper he had just completed comparing the poet to the great German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche.⁵⁷ Kasper immediately developed a tremendous admiration for the eccentric writer, and his extremist ideas heavily influenced wide-eyed Kasper.

⁵⁶ "Agitator Fights U.S. Order here: Influences People to Defy Law, Threatens School Students," *Clinton Courier News*, August 30, 1956.

⁵⁷ Jack Neely, "The Poet, the Bookseller, and the Clinton Riots," *Metro Pulse* (August 24, 2006), 2.

American poet Ezra Pound is considered the Godfather of modern poetry.

Despite his numerous literary contributions, Pound's reputation was devastated by his outspoken political beliefs. An apostle to the tenants of fascism, Pound praised leaders like Adolph Hitler and Benito Mussolini. In 1941, Pound delivered his first of many radio broadcasts from Italy attacking President Roosevelt, condemning Jews, and blaming both for American involvement in the war.⁵⁸ A year later Pound was indicted on charges of treason against the United States, but he continued his attack on American policy until 1945 when he was finally handed over to United States forces following a coup against Mussolini. With a pending charge that carried a possible life sentence, Pound agreed to settle for acquittal on the grounds that he was mentally unfit to stand trial. Deemed a disgraced traitor, Ezra Pound spent the next thirteen years at St. Elizabeth's Psychiatric Hospital in Washington D.C.⁵⁹

Following his college graduation, John Kasper ran a small bookstore in Greenwich Village, "Make it New", named after a 1935 book of essays by his new found idol, Ezra Pound. Not surprisingly, the shelves were stocked with anti-Semitic literature such as *Mein Kampf* and the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*, accompanied of course by a plethora titles recommended or written by Pound.⁶⁰ As Kasper's infatuation grew, he began to make frequent visits to St. Elizabeth's to see his mentor. In his letters, Kasper often addressed Pound as "Grandpaw" or "Master"; the intensity of his obsession is best illustrated in a letter penned to Pound on his sixtieth birthday where

⁵⁸ Louis Menand, "The Pound Error: The Elusive Master of Illusion." *The New Yorker*, June 9, 2008, 1.

⁵⁹ Webb, *Rabble Rousers: The American Far Right in the Civil Rights Era* , 49

⁶⁰ Ibid., 50

he emphatically proclaims, “You are the Almighty. You are God and the greatest of all men. You are MASTER, SAGE, WISDOM, POWER. [sic] You move all men to deed, deeds that are wise and virtuous. I praise you, I praise you, I praise you. I worship you. I love you.”⁶¹

The strange pair exchanged letters on a regular basis throughout the 1950s. Pound biographer E. Fuller Torrey gained access to the unpublished correspondence and regarded them as, “extraordinary, indicating a complete master-student relationship and an apparent willingness to do whatever Pound asked. Kasper worshipped Pound and believed that he possessed a wisdom which was divine in origin.”⁶² Kasper’s overt bigotry had not always been so obvious; some of his bookstore customers even went as far as describing him as a liberal.

“Make it New”, Kasper’s bookstore, was depicted by a reporter as, “a recognized center for the distribution of pro-Negro books and magazines and was patronized chiefly by Negroes and Negrophile whites....”⁶³ While residing in New York, Kasper’s circle of friends included many African- Americans, he even dated a black woman for a brief period. When African-American artist and friend Ted Joans and his Caucasian wife needed help finding housing in New York, which can be a difficult process for an interracial couple even in New York, Kasper quickly offered his assistance. Many of

⁶¹ Ibid., 49

⁶² Neely, *The Poet, the Bookseller, and the Clinton Riots*, 4

⁶³ Ibid., 4

Kasper's friends recall his absolute disdain for the abysmal treatment of blacks in the South during the early struggle for civil rights.⁶⁴

Some perceive Kasper as little more than Ezra Pound's pawn, while others are hesitant to hold the shamed artist responsible for Kasper's extreme antics. Neither side can dispute that Ezra Pound, whether intentional or not, had a considerable impact in shaping Kasper's fundamental beliefs. A few months prior to the desegregation of Clinton High School Pound proclaimed to Kasper that, "Nothing is more damnably harmful to everyone, white AND black than miscegenation, bastardization and mongrelization of EVERYTHING.[sic]"⁶⁵ Pound's anti-Semitic rhetoric and wild political conspiracies undoubtedly intrigued young Kasper as he opined to his supporters that integration was part of a "communist-jewish-international finance conspiracy against white America."⁶⁶ Unfortunately, many of Pound's letters to Kasper have not been found, leaving the degree of Pound's influence open for debate.

John Kasper's reputation as a racial agitator preceded his arrival in Clinton, Tennessee. A popular speaker at Ku Klux Klan rallies, Kasper joined forces with fellow segregationist Asa Carter to establish his own organization, the Seaboard White Citizen's Council. While campaigning with the Council in Charlottesville, Virginia, Kasper first got wind of the upcoming desegregation of Clinton High School. Ezra Pound once told an impressionable Kasper that to become a famous man he had to,

⁶⁴ Ibid., 4

⁶⁵ Ira Bruce Nadel, *Ezra Pound in Context*. Cambridge University Press, 2010), 102.

⁶⁶ Webb, *Rabble Rousers: The American Far Right in the Civil Rights Era*, 52

“do something, to take sides, no matter what the side was.”⁶⁷ Kasper saw the imminent crisis in Clinton as his anxiously awaited opportunity to make a name for himself. Under the charismatic spell of John Kasper, the unsuspecting town of Clinton, Tennessee erupted in a fury of hostility and chaos over racial integration, briefly transforming segregationist resistance into an alarming force.

John Kasper did not waste any time accruing followers. As soon as he arrived in Clinton he began knocking on doors handing out pamphlets spewing his hate filled rhetoric. One pamphlet displayed black GIs kissing French prostitutes at the end of World War II; Kasper asserted that this was what would happen if the desegregationists prevailed. Kasper’s propaganda claimed, “We are an action program. We proclaim action as our creed. We are fighting. You must fight with us.”⁶⁸ Most of Kasper’s support came from the lower income residents of Clinton and its neighboring counties.

Typically, active resistance to integration came from two sources: certain sections of the native mountaineers that were particularly hostile towards African Americans and the Deep South migrants that developing Oak Ridge brought to the area. Community leaders in Clinton emphatically point out that the disturbances generally came from outside agitators. The majority of Clinton’s residents saw Kasper for what he was, a loony Yankee looking to stir up trouble, and it did not take long for Clinton’s leadership to recognize the threat. Mayor W. E. Lewallen and several other

⁶⁷ David Chalmers, *Backfire: How the Ku Klux Klan Helped the Civil Rights Movement*: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), 8.

⁶⁸ Neely, *The Poet, the Bookseller, and the Clinton Riots*, 5

prominent members of the community organized a meeting with Kasper to persuade him to leave town.⁶⁹

Horace V. Wells, active in local affairs and editor of the town's newspaper, the *Clinton Courier-News*, was among the group encouraging Kasper to make his exit. Wells previously plead with the county courts to continue the legal fight against integration, but when the final decision was handed down he demonstrated an attitude of acceptance and urged his readers to do the same. The *Clinton Courier-News* provided comprehensive coverage throughout the process of desegregation.

On August 30, Wells issued a warning about Kasper branding him a, "born troublemaker who will only serve two purposes- to line his pockets with membership fees he will collect and turn this community upside down..."⁷⁰ Wells applauded the efforts of law enforcement and encouraged the community to remain steadfast in their commitment to maintain law and order reminding them that, "This country of ours was founded upon the Constitution- and Kasper would have you throw away the Constitution."⁷¹ Kasper, making it clear he had no intentions of leaving, was promptly arrested by the local authorities. Charmed by the idea of being seen as a martyr for his cause, Kasper refused bond and spent the night in jail. The next day, Monday, August 27, 1956 twelve black students and 715 white students attended classes together for the first time.⁷²

⁶⁹ Barrett, *Study in Desegregation: The Clinton Story*, 12

⁷⁰ Holden, Valien, and Valien, *Field Reports on Desegregation in the South: A Tentative Description and Analysis of the School Desegregation Crisis* , 13

⁷¹ Ibid., 13

⁷² "Clinton High Now Integrated: Some Teenagers Picket, but Opening Orderly; Washington Man Jailed," *The Oak Ridger*, August 27, 1956.

The first day went on with little incident, but as the week went on the size of the crowds outside the school began to swell. Kasper orchestrated a picket line outside the school and gave fiery speeches on the steps of the courthouse. As his poisonous charade gained momentum, his followers began to multiply. Kasper may have been the principle agitator at the helm, but he could not have pulled any of it off without the cooperation of his Anderson County allies. Playing on the anti-authoritarianism sentiment of the 1950s youth culture, Kasper began to mobilize white youth hoping that, "if the white kids will run the Negroes out as they appear in the schools, there will be no integration regardless to the mandates of Federal courts."⁷³

With tensions escalating rapidly, Federal Judge Taylor intervened issuing a restraining order which forbade Kasper from interfering with school integration. By Thursday, Clinton was infiltrated with cars from Mississippi, Georgia, Alabama, and North Carolina going up and down the streets protesting integration. People began pouring into the town square by the hundreds, for the citizens of Clinton, TN it was an unfamiliar scene they would not soon forget.⁷⁴

Clinton's small African American community was captivated by fear as the presence of the vicious mob continued to expand. Black students and families were repeatedly chased and harassed by the angry protestors. Full-fledged rioting quickly followed, cars were overturned, windows smashed, and African American residents and travelers were relentlessly terrorized. At night, frightened black residents listened to the continuous shouting and banging on the streets of Clinton. A terrified mother living on

⁷³ Webb, *Rabble Rousers: The American Far Right in the Civil Rights Era*, 58

⁷⁴ "Federal Judge Bans School Picketing," *Clinton Courier News*, August 30, 1956.

Foley Hill, surrounded by constant chaos and worried for the safety of her children, commented, “It’s the nights we fear- it’s the nights that have no eyes.”⁷⁵ The mob had taken over the town threatening to dynamite the mayor’s house, the newspaper plant, and even the courthouse, but one group of Clinton citizens refused to succumb to mob rule and vowed to stand their ground.

In 1956, Clinton’s police force consisted of seven men, including one constable who had not made an arrest in over twenty years. Completely outmatched by the unruly mob, Clinton citizens organized a “home guard” unit to protect the town. Local attorney W. Buford Lewallen, the Mayor’s son and former Speaker of the State House, teamed up with fellow lawyer and Silver Star Korean War Commander Leo Grant, Jr. to assemble the home defense team.⁷⁶ Prepared to protect their community at any cost, Grant commented, “I guess you might say we just up and formed a posse, good old-fashioned style. Forty-seven we rounded up in all, preachers, doctors, clerks- and most of us mighty scared, but also mighty provoked.”⁷⁷ When an elderly man showed up to join the guard, Grant told his 71 year old neighbor to go home. Refusing to leave he looked at Grant and sternly stated, “Son, this is my town, this- pointing to the street- is my home.”⁷⁸

The home guard was armed with a vast array of weapons including rifles, double barreled shot guns, derringers, old Colt .45s , and two machines guns and six tear gas

⁷⁵ Barrett, *Study in Desegregation: The Clinton Story*, 3

⁷⁶ "Clinton Plans Home Guard to Watch Segregation Rally After Mob Terror," *The Free Lance-Star*, September 1, 1956.

⁷⁷ Barrett, *Study in Desegregation: The Clinton Story*, 4

⁷⁸ Ibid.4

grenades they had acquired from the Mayor of Knoxville. Forming a line shoulder to shoulder, the scrappy volunteer guard marched toward the crowd, with Buford positioned behind a machine gun on the second floor of the old court house to cover his friends below. As the guard approached the packed crowd, gas grenades started to fly. Chaos immediately erupted and several more gas grenades were unleashed. Suddenly the screams to “kill the nigger lovers” were quieted by the sound of roaring sirens. Just in time to quell the violence, the 110 state highway patrolmen showed up and scattered the crowds.⁷⁹

With mob violence threatening the stability of Clinton, it was becoming increasingly evident that the small town was in over its head. On September 2, 1956, Tennessee National Guardsmen, decked out in full combat equipment, rolled into town. Just as churches started to let out on a quiet Sunday afternoon in Clinton, a contingency of seven tanks with 76 mm. guns and three armored personnel carriers with .50 caliber machine guns led over 600 troops past the courthouse. The dramatic military entrance also included 100 jeeps and trucks, five field kitchens, mobile communication carriers, several ambulances, and ammunition supplies. For tactical purposes, a National Guard helicopter was also stationed on the outskirts of town.⁸⁰ Gail Ann Epps of the Clinton 12 remembers the arrival of the National Guard, “It was a Sunday morning and we were in church. Even though we saw them as protectors; it was just like war.”⁸¹ State Adjutant General Maj. Gen. Joe W. Henry announced that the presence of the guard was, “for

⁷⁹ Davis, *Gifts Given: Family, Community, and Integration's Move from the Courtroom to the Schoolyard*, xii

⁸⁰ "Guard here has 600 Men, 100 Vehicles," *Clinton Courier News*, September 6, 1956.

⁸¹ Adamson, *Few Black Voices Heard: The Black Community and the Desegregation Crisis in Clinton, Tennessee*, 1956, 38

the sole purpose of restoring law and order.”⁸² He further noted that the guard would remain until the authorities were satisfied with the restoration of peace. Appropriately, official orders directing troop movement dubbed it, “Operation law and order.”⁸³

In George Barrett’s 1956 *New York Times* article, “Study in Desegregation: The Clinton Story” Barrett praised the effectiveness of the home guard’s strong stance against the mob. Demonstrating an unwillingness to back down, Barrett boasted, “Clinton is ready. The bulk of the community, fired by the example set by the forty-seven man “army” on the critical night two weeks ago, has rallied to the defense of the town.”⁸⁴ From all over the county, the Sheriff assembled a stand-by posse of approximately 200 policemen on high alert prepared to protect their homes and families.

Apparently Barrett was not the only one impressed by the effective resistance of the community. Clinton’s solid display of unity and determination caught Kasper and his followers completely off guard. Clinton’s firm stance sent a loud and clear message to Kasper and company that they meant business. Unlike his grand entrance two weeks prior when Kasper proudly waved around his arrest warrant, this time when the rabble-rouser returned to Clinton he quietly approached the Sheriff to ask for permission to hold a meeting.

Many of the men rounded up by the National Guard during the rioting later sought out photographers and reporters to apologize for their role in the chaos. Law abiding citizens who found themselves caught up in the hysteria later expressed

⁸² "Guardsmen Pulled from Leisure to Alert," *The Oak Ridger*, September 4, 1956.

⁸³ Webb, *Rabble Rousers: The American Far Right in the Civil Rights Era* , 46

⁸⁴Barrett, *Study in Desegregation: The Clinton Story*, 4

embarrassment over their actions. One resident explained that, "What happened to us is going to happen to a lot of communities when they try to integrate, some towns down here are going to make mistakes that we-maybe just by accident- didn't make, and they are going to lose law and order, and back down to the mob."⁸⁵ In the tough challenge of implementing integration, Clinton urged other communities to keep a watchful eye on the professional agitator and reminded us all that united we stand, divided we fall.

An Associated Press photographer looking back on the Clinton riots attested, "That was worse than Korea. In Korea we understood that there was a calculated risk, but we never knew what to expect here, and where to expect it from."⁸⁶ Governor Frank Clement used the help the National Guard in efforts to preserve the peace and keep the roads in Clinton open. The arrival of approximately 600 National Guardsmen and their subsequent occupation of the town brought an end to the worst of the violence. Many people felt without the presence of the National Guard, several lives might have been lost.

Clement's difficult decision to accept assistance from the National Guard marked yet another first in the Civil Rights Movement. Segregationists across the state rebuked the Governor's decision, but as the turbulence in Clinton captured the attention of both the nation and the world, many observers commended Clement's intervention strategy.

⁸⁷ One city official was asked why Clinton had been unable to solve its own problems, to

⁸⁵Ibid.4

⁸⁶ Halberstam, *The Town that Became Everybody's Test Tube*, 32-36

⁸⁷ Bob Fowler, "Gov. Frank Clement's Courage Recalled," *Knoxville News Sentinel*, August 20, 2008.

which he responded, "I'll tell you why—because no one wants us to, and no one will let us. We're everybody's test tube."⁸⁸

Clinton, Tennessee was undoubtedly treading in unchartered waters with the eyes of the world watching. The lone school in Tennessee facing desegregation, the small community was in a sense a test tube. The nation watched as Tennessee fought a battle not just for the people of Clinton but for the entire South. Some hoped that Clinton's experience would lay the framework for southern integration, but others, like the Citizens' Councils, wanted to illustrate the ugliness of desegregation in hopes of convincing other southern states that the unpleasant process was not worth trying.⁸⁹

From the *Pravda* in the Soviet Union running pictures of the "new, wild orgy of racists," to the Communist papers in East Berlin running stories titled, "The Mob reigns in Tennessee," the riots in Clinton received worldwide coverage.⁹⁰ News of mob action in Clinton spread quickly. Influential members of Clinton's small black community, Mr. and Mrs. Oscar Jarnagin, received a visit from a Red Cross representative at the request of their son serving overseas in Japan. Upon learning of his hometown crisis he immediately sent someone to check on the welfare of his parents. Clinton, Tennessee captivated the nation in the fall of 1956 as it became *Brown's* first guinea pig.

As television gained immense popularity in the 1950s, early programming focused primarily on entertainment. It was not until the latter part of the decade that the major television networks began emphasizing and investing in their news divisions.

⁸⁸ Halberstam, *The Town that Became Everybody's Test Tube*, 32

⁸⁹ Ibid., 35

⁹⁰ Neely, *The Poet, the Bookseller, and the Clinton Riots*, 7

Perhaps it is fortunate that evolution of television into a serious news medium happened to coincide with the Civil Rights Movement. With televised news in its infancy, “telejournalism, obviously, needed vivid pictures and clear-cut stories; less obviously, it also sought political and cultural gravitas.”⁹¹ The budding Civil Rights Movement provided television networks with their first major domestic news story.

Television brought unseen and often disturbing images of the African-American struggle for equality into living rooms across the country. Edward K. Murrow’s award-winning, prime-time news documentary series *See It Now* provided in-depth analysis of serious and controversial social issues. Murrow’s 1957 broadcast, “Clinton and the Law,” shed light on desegregation in the South and set precedence on the media’s portrayal of the southern integration crisis. As he told the nation the story of Clinton, Murrow described a town of law-abiding citizens, not necessarily in support of integration, but siding absolutely with law and order.

See It Now downplayed white supremacist politics by presenting Clinton as a town under siege by foreign influences and ideas. The broadcast dedicated a lengthy seven minutes to a fiery speech given by John Kasper in Kentucky. In his speech, Kasper hurled insults at President Eisenhower and argued that while impeachment efforts would prove futile, assassinating Supreme Court Justices appointed to life terms would be much more productive. Audiences across the nation witnessed the hate and rage John Kasper intended to spread with his eccentric ideologies.⁹² Murrow did a

⁹¹ Aniko Bodroghkozy, *Equal Time: Television and the Civil Rights Movement (History of Communication)*: University of Illinois Press, 43.

⁹² Anonymous *Clinton and the Law*, directed by Edward R. Murrow (: Columbia Broadcasting System television series, See it Now, January 1957).

tremendous job capturing the events that transpired in Clinton, Tn. Without his thorough coverage many may have never known the story of the courageous Clinton 12.

In January 1957, black leaders convened at the Conference on Transportation and Nonviolent Integration in Atlanta, Georgia and issued, “A Statement to the South and the Nation.” Delegates challenged federal officials and white southerners to, “realize that the treatment of Negroes is a basic spiritual problem... far too many have silently stood by as a violent minority stalks over the southland.”⁹³ The crisis in Clinton brought out both the best the worst of human nature. Unfortunately, the hatred and violence often overshadowed the beautiful displays of courage and love demonstrated throughout the community.

For many students inside the school was a sanctuary, a place where they could finally escape the menacing mob. Clinton high school teacher Margaret Anderson wrote of the unforgettable kindness she witnessed in her classroom during the turbulent first year. Anderson described the reactions of her students as John Kasper and his posse stood at the front of the school demanding entrance, “the Negro children sat and waited, they looked straight ahead, with almost frozen expressions. And strong white students moved near the doorways, and edged over and managed “conveniently” to find seats in front of, to the side of and behind the Negroes.” Anderson remembers the

⁹³ Martin Luther King, *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr: Volume IV: Symbol of the Movement, January 1957-December 1958*, ed. Clayborne Carson (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2000), 103.

moment as, "the most spontaneous, undirected gesture of true brotherhood, from the hearts of children, I have ever seen in my whole life."⁹⁴

Jo Ann Allen recalled a similar act of kindness that was shown to her family after her father was placed under arrest. Immediately after Allen was taken into custody, the white family that had employed her mother since she was 17 paid to have him released. Jo Ann always felt it was important to acknowledge that good existed on both sides. According to Jo Ann, "a lot of what happened in Clinton was due to complacency," whites and blacks pretty much got along; segregation was just the way of the day.⁹⁵

Quiet senior Bobby Cain, the oldest of the Clinton 12, was highly regarded by his peers, "he was the one who went first- the one the white folks picked on- the one who waited for us in the afternoon until the last one was safely out of the building."⁹⁶ Bobby Cain was their hero. The only black student eligible to graduate in 1956, Cain became one of the segregationists' favorite targets. Paralyzed by fear and haunted by intense hatred, Bobby spent many sleepless nights praying for it all to end. Overcome with anxiety, Cain wanted to give up, but his mother reminded him that, "she'd had to push for what little education she got and that, if he didn't stick, his brothers and sisters wouldn't have any place to go."⁹⁷ For the families of the Clinton 12, their battle was not one fought simply for their children but for their children's children and every generation

⁹⁴ Margaret Anderson, "Children in a Crucible - One Who Teaches in a Desegregated School Tells of the Day-to-Day Tensions of Integration as She has seen them Touch Her Pupils, Negro and White." *New York Times*, November 2, 1958.

⁹⁵ "An Evening with the Clinton 12" at the Children's Defense Fund Haley Farm in Norris, Tenn., Friday, Jan. 13, 2011.

⁹⁶ Margaret Anderson, "The South Learns its Hardest Lessons," *The New York Times*, September 11, 1960.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

to come. Twelve brave teenagers just trying to earn an education marched down Foley Hill in the face of unspeakable hatred, hopeful that their actions would pave the way for those that followed.

On November 17, with federal charges still pending, John Kasper was granted an acquittal by an Anderson County jury on local charges of inciting to riot and sedition. As the verdict was read, the crowded court room erupted in cheers. The state argued that it was Kasper's actions in Clinton that caused mobs to form and subsequent riots to outbreak. Kasper's defense team maintained that his actions were not to blame but rather the actions of the auxiliary police that caused the trouble.⁹⁸ In the weeks to follow, the harassment of black students became unbearable. Empowered by news of Kasper's acquittal, white students, organized as a White Youth Council, elevated their intimidation tactics.

According to high school students, only about 40 of the 700 students caused trouble. Generally, the students causing trouble outside the school were the same ones responsible for disruption inside the school. Once considered a safe haven, the rejuvenation of the White Youth Council resulted in black students enduring cruel verbal and physical abuse in the hallways and classrooms. Students were pushed and shoved, continually taunted with racist epithets, and pelted with eggs and stones. Principal Brittain, concerned for the welfare of his students, and desperately trying to maintain some semblance of order, discussed the situation with U.S. Attorney John

⁹⁸ John Powell, "School Integration Came 20 Years Ago," *Clinton Courier News*, September 9, 1976."Kasper Hearing Underway; Ask Release before Appeal," *The Oak Ridger*, September 6, 1956.

Crawford. Expecting little help from Crawford, Brittain turned to Police Chief Francis Moore for help. Moore agreed to step up the police presence at the school.⁹⁹

As the violence increased, several of the black students decided to stay home from school until it was safe to return. On November 29, the Anderson County Board of Education met and offered to pay transportation and tuition for the black students to attend segregated Austin High in Knoxville. Determined to stand their ground, the board's offer was rejected by every student, parent, plaintiff, and lawyer.¹⁰⁰ Local leader and pastor of Clinton's First Baptist Church, Reverend Paul Turner, was inclined to agree with the students and parents, commenting that, "So long as the law says they should attend the school, I think they have a moral right to attend."¹⁰¹ Reverend Turner, joined by mill worker Leo Burnett and local attorney Sidney Davis, who won the original case to uphold Tennessee state law upholding segregation, offered to escort the black students to and from school.¹⁰² Turner immediately received threatening phone calls warning him not to follow through with his plans. Unshaken by the pro-segregationist threats, the three white men carried out their promise to protect the students that opted to return to school.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Powell, *School Integration Came 20 Years Ago*, 4

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ "Pastor Points Up Christian Responsibility," *Clinton Courier News*, December 6, 1956.

¹⁰² Davis, *Gifts Given: Family, Community, and Integration's Move from the Courtroom to the Schoolyard* , 38

¹⁰³ "Boldest Move Yet to Enfore Integration: Federal Government Moves in as Judge Orders Mass Arrests to Halt School Disorders in Clinton, Tenn." *Life*, December 17, 1956, 40.

On December 4, 1956, led by moral conviction and courage, Turner, Burnette, and Davis successfully escorted six black students safely to school. As Reverend Turner started to head back towards the church he was suddenly attacked by a group of seven men and two women. A reporter from *Time Magazine* described the vicious beating as a violent, "storm of fists."¹⁰⁴ After putting up an impressive fight, Turner's battered body fell against a car covering it in blood as the angry mob continued to punch and kick the defeated minister. Images of the blood-spattered car appeared in newspapers across the nation accompanied by headlines expressing disgust and outrage over the malicious attack.

Shortly after the Reverend's bloody encounter, two white boys looking for black students dashed into the school. As the pair ran through the halls, they ran into Reverend Turner's wife, a home economics teacher at the school. Principal Brittain arrived just in time to witness the jostling of his colleague, and as he turned to face the cowardly culprits they arrogantly dared Brittain to retaliate. After the duo fled, Principal Brittain ordered the immediate dismissal of all classes until further notice.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Elaine Allen Lechtreck, "Southern White Ministers and the Civil Rights Movement" (Doctor of Philosophy, Union Institute and University, 2010), 15.

¹⁰⁵ *Boldest Move Yet to Enfore Integration: Federal Government Moves in as Judge Orders Mass Arrests to Halt School Disorders in Clinton, Tenn.*, 40

CHAPTER 4

FROM TRADGEDY TO TRIUMPH

On the same day that Reverend Paul Turner was accosted, a local election was being held for mayor and three seats on the Board of Aldermen. Candidates backed by the White Citizens Council were sorely disappointed when Clinton residents flocked to the polls in record numbers to ensure their defeat. The overwhelming rejection of the outspoken pro-segregationist candidates and the election of fair-minded Judge T. Lawrence Seeber as mayor sent a loud and clear message to segregationists.¹⁰⁶

The following Sunday, Reverend Turner delivered a powerful sermon to an audience of over 700 in which he declared, "There is no color line around the cross... truth and love are sterile concepts unless they are incarnated in life actions and attitudes."¹⁰⁷ Paul Turner challenged his congregation to embody Christian ideals, to pursue love and turn from hate. Encouraging adherence with authority, Turner cited a letter from St. Paul to the Romans, "Let every person be subject to the governing authority for there is no authority except from God."¹⁰⁸

Clinton High remained closed while local and state governments struggled to come up with a solution. With their backs against the wall, the Anderson County school board turned to the federal government for help. Basically, the view of the board was,

¹⁰⁶ "Clinton Trial Jury Deliberates," *The Leader-Post*, July 23, 1957.

¹⁰⁷ "Clinton Pastor Criticizes Mob Action from Pulpit," *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, December 11, 1956.

¹⁰⁸ "Beaten White Pastor Denounces Color Line" *The Spokesman-Review*, December 10, 1956.

you got us into this mess, now you better get us out. In its letter to U.S. Attorney General Herbert Brownell, the school board argued that, "considerable confusion has arisen as a result of the board's conscientious attempt to comply with the Court's order abolishing segregation while at the same time the federal authorities fail to enforce the same courts injunction forbidding anyone, including students, from interfering with integration."¹⁰⁹ Angry and overwhelmed, the school board felt that the federal government neglected to uphold its end of the bargain; they could not understand why the integration crisis receiving international attention was being ignored by the American government.¹¹⁰

Tuesday December 4th Anderson County school officials met with Judge Robert Taylor in Knoxville and an unexpected attendee, local U.S. attorney John C. Crawford. Hoping to come up with some sort of solution, the school board insisted that the federal government should enforce its own ruling. Although Crawford was in concurrence with the board's criticism, he explained that Governor Clement preferred state control over law and order. Crawford suggested that the local authorities confer with Clement but gave his word that Uncle Sam would handle the federal court orders.¹¹¹

Backing up his big talk with action, the very next day eight U.S. marshalls teamed up with local law enforcement to investigate the activities of those involved in disturbances at Clinton High School. The task force intended to take before Federal

¹⁰⁹ "School Board Sends Brownell Ultimatum," *The News and Courier*, December, 4, 1956.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Lovett, *The Civil Rights Movement in Tennessee: A Narrative History* , 48

Court in Knoxville, “all persons who may have willfully violated the order of the court.”¹¹² With arrests warrants issued, 16 people were corralled and held in contempt of federal court orders in what *Life Magazine* called the, “Boldest Move Yet to Enforce Integration.” Among those placed in custody included notorious trouble-maker John Kasper, the alleged head of the Anderson County White Citizen’s Council, W.H. Tillman, and Clyde Cook who helped carry out the attack on Reverend Turner.¹¹³ On December 10, just six days after the school shut its doors, Clinton High School was reopened.

In northern Alabama *Times Daily* columnist, Tom Stokes detailed the events surrounding the trial of John Kasper and his co-conspirators describing a, “Circle of Widening Courage.” Stokes begins by applauding the selfless actions of Reverend Turner, commenting that it was, “that day it all started, with one human being who was not afraid.”¹¹⁴ Perhaps it was the courage of men like Turner, Davis, and Burnett that inspired another daring dozen. After deliberating for two hours and twenty minutes, an all-white jury consisting of ten men and two women found John Kasper and his six co-defendants guilty of conspiring to interfere with the integration of Clinton High School as ordered by the Supreme Court of the United States.¹¹⁵ Twelve jurors stood up for decency, for law and order, and rendered an improbable verdict that was described by

¹¹² Powell, *School Integration Came 20 Years Ago*

¹¹³ *Boldest Move Yet to Enfore Integration: Federal Government Moves in as Judge Orders Mass Arrests to Halt School Disorders in Clinton, Tenn.*, 39

¹¹⁴ Tom Stokes, "Circle of Courage Widening," *Times Daily*, June 25, 1957.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

one editorialist as, “the one bright spot in the sorry spectacle over civil rights which is now being played out in both Washington and the South.”¹¹⁶

Clinton teacher Margaret Anderson, well aware of the complex nature of desegregation, often wondered if southern educators would successfully meet the challenges of integration with the strength and courage required to be successful. Then, she remembered the young black girl who stopped crying long enough to say, “If Bobby Cain can do it, so can I.”¹¹⁷ In a 1957 article in Pageant Magazine entitled, “Lord Help Me Not to be Scared,” Bobby Cain discussed his experiences at Clinton High, “Integration ain’t so hot,” he commented, “I mean integration is right, but it ain’t so hot for the guy who has to dodge the bricks.”¹¹⁸ Cain’s humble presence and quiet courage won the respect of his classmates, “He’s going to get his diploma,” the white boys said. “He’s earned it.”¹¹⁹ To ensure Bobby’s safety, Principal Brittain organized a group of students, predominantly football players, to serve as protective patrol in the case of any disturbances.

On May 18, 1956, on the third anniversary of the Supreme Court decision declaring segregation unconstitutional, Bobby Cain walked across the stage with 87 of his white classmates and received his diploma. Of the original twelve African-American students two eventually graduated from Clinton High. Bobby Cain’s graduation from Clinton High School made him the first African-American to graduate from a white public

¹¹⁶ "The Kasper Case- One Blue Chip," *The Washington Afro- American*, July 27, 1957.

¹¹⁷ Anderson, *The South Learns its Hardest Lessons*, 5

¹¹⁸ "Stop Running and Take a Stand- Bobby Cain'," *The Washington Afro- American*, Septemer 10, 1957.

¹¹⁹ Anderson, *The South Learns its Hardest Lessons*, 1

high school in the South. Hopeful that his days of dodging bricks were over, Cain issued a plea to others that, "Integration must go on, colored people must stop running and take a stand."¹²⁰

With the crisis in Clinton seemingly winding down, residents began to breathe just a little bit easier. Restoration of peace brought back a sense of hope and optimism to the broken town. As the new school year got underway the following September, eight African American students entered school without any public protest, the small town was finally quiet once again. Inside the school lingering resentment made the transition difficult for the new black students, but as the school year progressed, tensions subsided. Stability increased, violence decreased, and black enrollment continued to climb at Clinton High School. For awhile the residents of Clinton enjoyed a return to normalcy, but before the fall of the final curtain, Clinton once again found itself in the national spotlight for a dramatic final act.¹²¹

Two years after Clinton High became the first public school in the south to test the waters of integration, the town was once again ripped apart. Before the sun came up on Oct. 5, 1958, an estimated 75 to 100 dynamite sticks placed in Clinton High School were shot off in successive blasts, completely demolishing most of the school. Thankfully, the building was empty and no serious injuries were sustained. As shocked residents viewed the horrific scene, the issue of integration suddenly seemed futile. Principal W.D. Human stared at the leveled school house with tears rolling down his cheeks. Neighbors stood side by side unable to hide their emotional reactions as they

¹²⁰ 'Stop Running and Take a Stand- Bobby Cain'

¹²¹ Anderson, *The South Learns its Hardest Lessons*, 1

witnessed the devastation first hand, “strong men wept as they looked down at the shattered walls, the splintered desks, the broken glass, the warped lockers in which children once put their lunch boxes.”¹²² Although John Kasper was believed to be the mastermind behind the destruction, a federal investigation never led to any arrests.

Governor Clement encouraged scared citizens to carry on, “Don’t let those children miss a single day of school,” he urged, “take them out on the lawn to hold classes if necessary, but show those dynamiters that Clinton High School isn’t going to be closed one single day.”¹²³ Following the Governor’s advice the school remained open with classes temporarily held in the gymnasium, the building’s only remaining structure. Plans were quickly made to relocate Clinton students to an abandoned Oak Ridge school. Work that would normally take weeks to finish was completed in only three days with over 200 volunteers showing up to help get the school ready.¹²⁴ On the football field the neighboring schools were bitter rivals, but as the students from Clinton arrived on their first day they were welcomed by the Oak Ridge High School band in full uniform, playing Clinton High's alma mater.¹²⁵

There was little doubt that the bombing was orchestrated by segregationists who felt threatened by Clinton’s prospering integrated school. Once again segregationists tried to rattle the small community, and once again the determined citizens of Clinton

¹²² Drew Pearson, "Clinton Offers Lesson," *The Tuscaloosa News*, October 3, 1966.

¹²³ Drew Pearson, "School's Bronze Plaque Thanks all Who Donated 'Bricks and Friendship'," *Gadsden Times*, March 13, 1963.

¹²⁴ Wilman Dykeman and James Stokely, "Clinton, Tennessee: A Town on Trial," *The New York Times*, October 26, 1958.

¹²⁵ Davis, *Gifts Given: Family, Community, and Integration's Move from the Courtroom to the Schoolyard*, 159

rose to the challenge. Not wasting any time, residents of Clinton immediately began the slow process of rebuilding, with little help from Washington. Instead, assistance came from across the nation in the form of friendship bricks. Using tin boxes wrapped in red paper and shaped like bricks, students all over the country collected money to help rebuild the damage done by bombs of hate. Humbled by the overwhelming response, the new school building proudly displays a bronze plaque commemorating the generosity of each person who sent a “brick of friendship” to help rebuild Clinton High School.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ Pearson, *School's Bronze Plaque Thanks all Who Donated 'Bricks and Friendship'*

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

During the turbulent first year of integration, the residents of Clinton, Tennessee endured great hardship and persevered. Even though the majority of people in Clinton did not desire integration, they accepted the change out of respect for the law. After witnessing firsthand the dangerous effects of lawlessness, residents of Clinton fought to restore peace to their quiet town. As outside agitators tried to tear the town apart, neighbors joined together in defense of their community values.

On January 13, 2011 ,at the Haley Lodge on the Alex Haley Farm, surviving members of the Clinton twelve and their families were remembered for their efforts fifty-five years ago to break down the walls of segregation. Jo Ann Allen Boyce challenged everyone in the room to take responsibility and make sure that the story of the Clinton twelve is told. Noting the capacity of history to repeat itself, Jo Ann told the audience "we must stop the ugliness; we all have to work together against the Kasper's of the world."¹²⁷ Blaming complacency and ignorance for the events that occurred in Clinton in 1956, Jo Ann emphasized the importance of preaching tolerance and delivered a message of hope. James Cain, younger brother of Bobby Cain, reiterated the need to keep telling their story, "The courage of the Clinton 12 was a key event of the civil rights

¹²⁷ "An Evening with the Clinton 12" at the Children's Defense Fund Haley Farm in Norris, Tenn., Friday, Jan. 13, 2011. Anonymous .

movement...the message of the Clinton 12 is still relevant today. We can follow in the footsteps of the Clinton 12 to overcome racial injustice in this country."¹²⁸

¹²⁸Ibid.

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